

HOLTERHOFF

A BLIND AMERICAN GIRL'S ARTISTIC TRIUMPH

Hampton's Mag.
April, 1911

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A BLIND AMERICAN GIRL'S ARTISTIC TRIUMPH

HOW much can the blind see? Are there mental eyes? Can the brain of the blind be quickened to conjure up images not far from reality?

Mrs. Godfrey Holterhoff, of Los Angeles, believes that in such a sense her daughter sees, sees things correctly, as they have been described to her. There are people who "have eyes and see not"; Leila Holterhoff has not eyes and sees.

When, as a month-old baby, a score of years and more ago in Dayton, Ohio, a physician's blunder deprived Leila Holterhoff of sight, the mother resolved that every humanly possible effort should be made to compensate her for the loss. To-day that blind girl is singing on the concert stage in Germany, and next winter will tour America. She dances, swims, rows, rides horse-

back and a bicycle. She has a teacher's diploma in Latin. She speaks fluently and writes French, German, Italian and Spanish, and has a working knowledge of Finnish, Hungarian and Dutch. She has remarkable powers of description. All this has been made possible by her mother's devoted instruction and fierce love and ambition, her father's comradeship and support, and her own application and undauntedness.

Miss Holterhoff, for her musical début, challenged the cold calculating ear of Berlin, and won. Harriet M. Behneó, the original *Suzuki* in "Madame Butterfly," wrote: "Miss Holterhoff's stage presence is splendid, and not for a single moment does her lack of sight hinder her in her work or influence her public to sympathize with her." Within the past two years she has appeared in concert in Berlin, London, Paris, Florence, St. Petersburg and Munich, and is now giving in Weimar a series of lectures on Wagner's operas, which she illustrates and interprets.

Such achievements would be remarkable in any young girl, and this one is blind! The story of her education is as interesting in its way as that of Helen Keller. Leila's father thought it selfish to keep the child with them to her detriment, and she was placed in the school for the blind at Berkeley, California. She was home in a month, for the mother with a woman's weapons—tears—persuaded the father to let her try her method. She did not wish her child segregated with the afflicted, or by herself. She wished Leila to mingle with other people and ignore her blindness to the limits of possibility. Mr. Wilkinson, head of the Berkeley institution, told Mrs. Holterhoff she was allowing blind mother love to work great wrong to the child.

Leila early learned to use a typewriter, and after help in her studies from her mother and father, entered a large private school. In a week the principal telephoned, "Have no fear, Leila will do the work beautifully."

One day the child made a demand for a luncheon basket, and the morning she went off with her new acquisition she said, "Oh, dear love, I do feel so grand and other-peoplish."

To be "other-peoplish" has been the desire inspired by her parents. Her mother early decided that blind people should not be her child's associates and their ways should

not be her ways. She never capitulated to Leila's misfortune by making things easy for her. The child was sent to find things, to fetch and carry like other children. She was not permitted to lay her hands upon people. Instead, they were carefully described to her. Furniture was moved without telling her; yet she was not allowed to feel her way about with groping hands, nor to walk flat-footed. To prevent this, the mother got down on the floor and followed the child about, arching her feet and flexing her knees. Let any reader walk in an absolutely darkened room, and he will find that he advances his arms and flattens his feet. Then he will realize what overcoming these instincts in a blind person means.

Those familiar with the habits of the blind will know how remarkable it is that Leila prepares her own food and eats with a knife and fork.

Miss Holterhoff, in speaking, says, "I saw —." Her mother says she sees. With her mental eyes she detects all usual objects as she passes along the street. By some rarefied, intensified sense, she *feels* colors. She *feels* the time of day. To the eyes of her mind, each individual forms a mental picture. She knows whether a man be fat or thin, tall or short, handsome or ugly, mustached or smooth-shaven, by his voice!

This exquisite sensitiveness of her ear undoubtedly has something to do with the trueness of Miss Holterhoff's voice. It is an example of the workings of the mysterious law of compensation.

The girl's mother has had her own triumph and reward. Some time ago an expert on teaching the blind wrote her: "I approve of your procedure; *all* blind pupils should attend the public school with other children at least one year." The contribu-

tion of an idea like this to the training of the sightless is of no slight significance.



LEILA HOLTERHOFF, BLIND AMERICAN GIRL SUCCESSFUL ON EUROPEAN CONCERT STAGE.



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A blind American girl's artistic triumph.

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